

History of Santa Cruz County California with Biographical Sketches by Edward Martin. Historic Record Company, Los Angeles, Calif. 1911. Located in Santa Cruz Public Library, Santa Cruz, CA.

Excerpts from the above source, as they pertain to the fruit industry of the Watsonville area pre-1911:

p. 108: The first orchard in this valley [Pajaro] was planted...in 1853 by Jesse D. Carr. Its location was two miles east of Watsonville on what is now known as the old Silliman homestead. This orchard was about two acres in area and contained a general mixture of fruit for home use. Some of the original trees are still bearing fruit [in 1911].

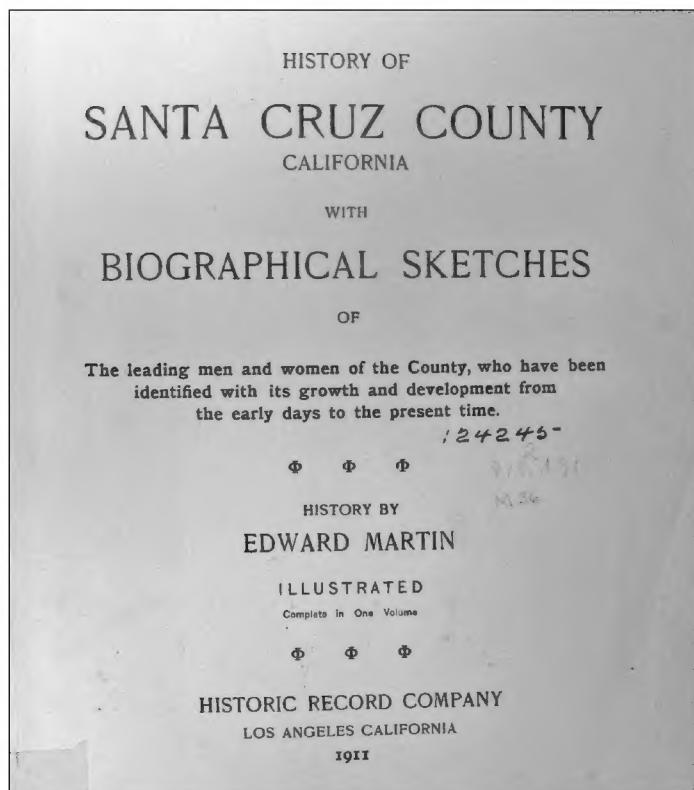
The second orchard planted was by William F. White, in 1854...Scott planted fruit trees on a portion of what is now the plaza. The latter were still standing as late as 1870. The writer recalls eating fruit from those trees at that time.

G.M. Bockius was one of the early planters, having set out fifty-two trees of mixed varieties in 1857.

The first commercial orchards were set out by Isaac Williams and Judge R.F. Peckham in 1858. Williams planted thirteen acres to apples principally on land now owned by K.F. Redman. Peckham planted six acres on what is now called the Gaily place. The Moss peach orchard and the Sanford orchard were planted about the same time. These orchards were located on the Santa Cruz road at the extreme western limit of the valley.

p. 109: As these early orchards were entirely experimental, it was the rule to plant many varieties. With apples the popular varieties were Smith Cider, Rhode Island Greening, Rambo, Gravenstein, Jonathan, Newton Pippin and Bellflower...Most of the trees were procured from San Jose nurseries, and were hauled in wagons...These trees cost at the nurseries from \$1 to \$1.50 each.

In 1860 the total amount planted to fruit trees in our valley did not exceed fifty acres...



Cover of the above mentioned book.

In the winter of 1861-62 Jacob Blackburn planted an apple orchard of twelve acres. This was for many years the model orchard of the valley. This tract has recently been subdivided into town lots, but many of the original trees remain and bear good fruit.

Blackburn might well be called the father of the apple industry in Pajaro. He, above all others, through the experiments which he conducted, demonstrated the most profitable varieties to plant...

p. 110: The same winter, that of 1861-62, James Waters planted 1900 apple trees on the bottom land now owned by William Birlem, and the adjoining piece belonging to the orphanage. After the abatement of the renowned flood of 1862, not one tree was left...

Louis Martinelli, Daniel Tuttle, Charles Smith, Lum Smith, Thomas Becki, Mike Gagnon, Dunlap and others, followed with their plantings within the next year or two...

As this valley was so isolated on account of such poor shipping facilities, and as other sections more favorably situated were raising enough to supply the markets, prices ruled low and few trees were planted during the period between 1865 and 1875.

To illustrate of how little consequence apples were considered during this time, when J.M. Rodgers planted an orchard of four acres, in 1868, he was derided by some of his friends and neighbors for planting so much. They said he would have more than enough for family use and could not sell the remainder. Their prediction proved true for a time, for during the next few years orchardists were glad to get twenty-five or thirty cents per box for their apples.

This was not the case with pears at this time, however, for the late G.M. Bockius informed us that in 1868 Porter Brothers of Chicago came here and paid him \$2.50 per box for his pears, and they furnished the boxes and did the packing...

p. 111: The first shipment of apples from Pajaro valley was made by Isaac Williams. They were shipped by way of Hudson's landing to San Francisco. Charles Williams, a merchant of Watsonville, was the first to buy fruit on the tree and handle it after the manner of our present system. This was in 1869. In 1870 the space devoted to fruit trees in Pajaro valley did not exceed two hundred and fifty acres. The handling of our fruit was greatly facilitated on the completion of the railroad into our valley in 1870, but this did not stimulate tree planting.

The first strong lasting demand for Pajaro apples dates back to the decline of the industry in Santa Clara and other bay counties which had been supplying the markets of the state with apples. Almost simultaneously two of the worst pests of the apple made their appearance in those districts, the pernicious or San Jose scale from the Orient appearing in 1873 and the codling-moth from Europe, by way of the eastern states, in 1874. Unable to check the inroad of these pests, the orchardists of those sections became discouraged and one by one, dug up their apple orchards, so that by 1880 there was scarcely an apple tree left of over a million that originally had been planted.

With the decline of the industry in the sections mentioned, dealers began to search for apples in localities in which the pests had not secured a foothold.

Marco Rabasa* was the first apple dealer to come to Pajaro. This was about 1876. L.G. Sresovich* followed shortly afterwards. Up to this time he [probably means "we"] had no fruit pests. Codling moth was brought into our valley in old boxes shipped in by these men in 1877. San Jose scale made its appearance in about 1880 and probably originated from nursery stock brought from San Jose.

* [Marco Rabasa (1827 Janjina, Pelješac - 1900 San Jose); L.G. Sresovich (1848 Lopud island - 1908 Brentwood, CA)]

The continued decrease in the output from San Jose, with [p. 112] consequent increase in demand and prices, greatly stimulated the planting of trees, and yearly from that period up to 1901 there was a constantly increasing acreage planted. That year witnessed the most extensive planting in the history of the district, 156,000 apples trees or 1,780 acres being planted, the varieties almost exclusively Newtown Pippins and Bellflowers.

These early dealers paid the orchardists from \$100 to \$150 per acre for the fruit on the tree, and in turn sold it at from \$2.50 to \$4 per box in San Francisco. It is said that one season in the late '70s, Rabasa secured the fruit on the Blackburn orchard for \$1,800. After selling enough to pay for the fruit, he sold the remainder to L.G. Sresovich for \$8,000. The acreage planted to trees in 1880 did not exceed 500 acres.

Another factor which figured in the increased acreage during this period was the strawberry industry. The completion of the Corralitos water system in 1878 afforded water for irrigation purposes and in the early '80s large acreages were planted to strawberries. As trees planted among the berries grew vigorously, and required no special care, and as berries could be profitably grown until the trees attained bearing age, the thrifty berry growers made it a rule to plant out all berry fields to apple trees. The greater portion of the orchards on level land north and east of Watsonville were originally planted to strawberry fields.

p. 113: While there was a steady increase in the acreage yearly planted to apples during the decade succeeding 1880, the most extensive planting in the history of the industry began about 1890. By this time those who had hesitated fearing that the business would be overdone now gained confidence in the stability of the apple market. The chief factor, however, in bringing about this accelerated planting of trees was the establishment of the sugar factory in 1888. The farmer soon learned that he could raise trees and at the same time make the land yield a good profit by raising beets between the trees. To such an extent was this plan carried out that about 1895 the sugar factory officials, becoming alarmed lest no beet acreage would be left, and to discourage tree planting, refused to give out contracts for planting beets in orchards, stating, among other reasons, that they did not propose to ruin their own business by encouraging fruit-tree planting. This, however, did not deter the farmers in the least, as he could raise other crops—beans, potatoes and corn between the trees.

While it was demonstrated in the '60s that the Newton and Bellflower attained their highest perfection here, and while, as time wore on, they continually gained in public favor, and were mainly planted, yet there were those who, thinking these two varieties would be overdone, planted other varieties, their preference running to red apples.

p. 114: Between 1885 and 1895 considerable acreages were planted to Missouri Pippin, Red Pearmain, Lawver and Lanford Seedling. As these had to come in sharp competition with the eastern red apple, and as our Newton Pippin and Bellflowers were more in demand and commanded higher prices, the two last-named varieties were planted almost exclusively between 1895 and 1905. During the last few years a strong demand with attractive prices has arisen particularly in Australia and New Zealand, consequently the tendency is again toward planting the red varieties.

At present [1911] there are in round numbers 1,000,000 apples trees planted on 14,000 acres in Pajaro district. Of this number fully seven-eighths are Newtons and Bellflowers, the proportion of three Newtons to two Bellflowers...Less than one-half of the trees are in full bearing.